

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 18842

THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM WAS SENT 27 JUN 78 FM AMCONSUL UDORN
TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK INFO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE AND IS REPEATED
FOR YOUR INFO

QUOTE:

C O N F I D E N T I A L UDORN 0144

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF LA TH
SUBJECT: LOCAL OFFICIALS COMMENT ON REFUGEE SITUATION

1. CONSUL ESCORTED D/HA/ORM REPRESENTATIVE SHEP
LOWMAN, EA REFUGEE OFFICER JACK FREIDMAN, IRC EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR CARELL STERNBERG AND AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
POLITICAL COUNSELLOR DAVID PASSAGE ON THREE DAY VISIT
TO REFUGEE SITES AND CALLS ON LOCAL OFFICIALS IN THREE
PROVINCES OF UBON, NAKHON PHANOM (NKP) AND NONG KHAI
JUNE 13-15. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS
REGARDING MAIN REFUGEE ISSUES FOLLOWS.

2. RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES IN NORTHEAST - INITIAL
RESPONSE OF UBON GOVERNOR PRAMOON CHANCHAMON AND NKP
GOVERNOR SOMPORN KLINGPONGSA, ALONG WITH OTHER
OFFICIALS CONSULTED, TO QUESTION OF LOCAL RESETTLEMENT
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OF REFUGEES WAS ALMOST UNIFORMLY NEGATIVE. THEY RECITED
FAMILIAR LIST OF SECURITY, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REASONS
WHY SUCH RESETTLEMENT WOULD BE AN UNACCEPTABLE BURDEN
ON LOCAL THAI POPULATION AS WELL AS ON THEMSELVES. WHEN
POINT WAS MADE BY VISITORS THAT LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF
REFUGEES COULD BE SUPPORTED BY GENEROUS INTERNATIONAL
FINANCING THAT SHOULD PRODUCE SUBSTANTIAL BENEFITS FOR

THAI POPULACE AS WELL, OFFICIALS SEEMED TO SOFTEN THEIR NEGATIVE STANCE A BIT BUT MOST REMAINED CLEARLY TROUBLED AT PROSPECT OF PERMITTING REFUGEES TO STAY IN THAILAND PERMANENTLY. HOWEVER, BOTH UBON AND NKP GOVERNORS INDICATED THAT SHOULD CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGKOK DECIDE TO PROCEED WITH LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES, THEY WOULD CARRY OUT SUCH SETTLEMENT AS DIRECTED, ALBEIT GRUDGINGLY.

3. FORCED REPATRIATION - UBON GOVERNOR PRAMON CLAIMED THAT HE IS NOT TURNING BACK REFUGEES TO LAOS AT PRESENT TIME. HOWEVER, BOTH NKP GOVERNOR SOMPORN AND BUNG KAN DISTRICT POLICE CHIEF MAJOR MANOP, NONG KHAI PROVINCE, SAID BLUNTLY THAT THEY ARE INDEED ENGAGED IN FORCED REPATRIATION

OF LAO REFUGEES. FORMER QUALIFIED HIS REMARKS SOMEWHAT BY STATING THAT HE DOES PERMIT SOME OLD PEOPLE, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN AND BUDDHIST MONKS AMONG REFUGEES TO STAY IN NKP BUT HE INSISTS ON RETURNING MEN BACK TO LAOS, PARTICULARLY YOUNG ONES. LATTER NOTED THAT WHILE HE ATTEMPTS TO DISCOURAGE ALL LOWLAND LAO REFUGEES FROM ENTERING BUNG KAN DISTRICT, IN PRACTICE HE ONLY SUCCEEDS IN REFOULING THOSE LOWLAND LAO ACTUALLY ENCOUNTERED IN ACT OF CROSSING MEKONG RIVER. QVE INDICATED THAT A NUMBER OF REFUGEES RETURNED TO LAOS IN THIS FASHION HAD SIMPLY WAITED AN EXTRA DAY OR TWO AND THEN RECROSSED MEKONG INTO THAILAND AT CONFIDENTIAL

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ANOTHER LOCATION, UNDETECTED.

4. REFUGEE INFLUX - UBON REFUGEE CAMP COMMANDER PRAWIT STATED THAT OFFICIAL POPULATION OF CAMP HAD JUST RECENTLY BEEN ADJUSTED UPWARDS FROM 13,200 TO 22,500, THEREBY LEGALIZING PRESENCE OF MORE THAN NINE THOUSAND REFUGEES RESIDENT IN CAMP BUT LACKING APPROVAL FOR REGISTRATION ON FOOD RATION ROSTER. CAMP COMMANDER PRAWIT ESTIMATED THAT REFUGEE POPULATION IS INCREASING BY APPROXIMATELY ONE THOUSAND PER MONTH. HE NOTED THAT SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF NEWCOMERS ARE REFUGEES WHO HAD BEEN LIVING ILLEGALLY IN OUTLYING DISTRICTS FOR SOME TIME. UBON GOVERNOR PRAMON ESTIMATED THAT PERHAPS 10-13,000 LAO REFUGEES ARE STILL LIVING OUTSIDE REFUGEE CAMP. HE SAID THAT HE HAS A PENDING REQUEST WITH MOI FOR AUTHORIZATION TO MOVE THEM ALL INTO CAMP.

5. BUNG KAN POLICE CHIEF MAJOR MANOP STATED THAT HIS DISTRICT IS AVERAGING 300-500 HMONG ARRIVALS PLUS ABOUT 100-150 LOWLAND LAO REFUGEES PER MONTH. NKP GOVERNOR SOMPORN CALCULATED THAT ONLY 50-100 REFUGEES ARE ENTERING HIS PROVINCE EACH MONTH BECAUSE OF HIS TOUGH EXCLUSION

POLICY.

6. COMMENT: A NOTABLE EXCEPTION TO SENTIMENTS EXPRESSED IN PARA 2 ABOVE REGARDING LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES IS ATTITUDE OF NONG KHAI CHAMNAN POTCHANA. HE SUPPORTS CONCEPT OF SETTLING LOWLAND LAO AND HMONG IN THAILAND, ARGUING THAT IT IS BETTER TO TURN REFUGEES INTO PRODUCTIVE INDIVIDUALS RATHER THAN CONFINING THEM INDEFINITELY TO REFUGEE CAMPS WHERE THEY HAVE NOTHING TO DO. HE ALSO ENVISAGES SOME OF REFUGEES, PARTICULARLY HMONG AS USEFUL BULWARKS AGAINST COMMUNIST INSURGENTS. UNFORTUNATELY RIGID TIME CONSTRAINTS OF VISITORS' TRAVEL SCHEDULE DID NOT AFFORD THEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH GOVERNOR CHAMNAN.

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7. WITH REFERENCE TO GOVERNOR PRAMOON'S STATEMENT IN PARA 3 ABOVE DENYING REFOULEMENT OF REFUGEES TO LAOS, WE THINK THAT IT IS LESS THAN TRUTHFUL. BASED ON OUR PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS WITH UBON DISTRICT OFFICIALS, PLUS GOVERNOR'S WELL KNOWN DISTASTE FOR REFUGEES, WE BELIEVE IT LIKELY THAT AUTHORITIES IN SOME BORDER DISTRICTS ARE CONTINUING TO DISCOURAGE ENTRY OF REFUGEES INTO UBON, BY FORCE IF NECESSARY. GOVERNOR PRAMOON'S RELUCTANCE TO CANDIDLY ADMIT THIS FACT PROBABLY STEMS FROM CONTROVERSY HE TRIGGERED WITH HIS FRANK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO NY TIMES REPORTER HENRY KAMM LAST FEBRUARY THAT HE WAS FORCIBLY RETURNING REFUGEES TO LAOS. GOVERNOR PRAMOON WAS SUPPOSEDLY CHASTISED BY HIS MOI SUPERIORS FOR THIS INDISCRETION.

8. AS A FINAL COMMENT ON SUBJECT OF REFOULEMENT IT REMAINS OUR IMPRESSION THAT WHILE AUTHORITIES IN SOME OF NORTHEAST'S 4 DISTRICTS BORDERING LAOS AND CAMBODIA CONTINUE TO FORCIBLY SEND A NUMBER OF REFUGEES BACK, GREAT MAJORITY OF PEOPLE ENTERING REGION ARE PERMITTED TO STAY.
FINNEY

UNQUOTE
O'DONOHUE

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